AN EXHORTATION TO A SERIOUS REFORMATION OF LIFE AND MANNERS.

BEING

The late Bishop of *London*'s

FIFTH PASTORAL LETTER;

OCCASIONED

By the DANGERS that threatened this Nation from the late Wicked and Unnatural Rebellion.

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BRITISH MUSEUM

AN

EXHORTATION

TO A

Serious Reformation of LIFE and MANNERS, &c.

THE Occaſion of my applying to you at this Time*, and in this way, is, to ſet before you ſome duties which God more particularly calls for and requires of us, in times of public danger and calamity. And, that what I have to offer to you may have the greater weight, I will enforce it by warnings and examples in the like caſe, as we find them recorded in the holy ſcriptures; which, in the words of St. Paul, (Rom. 4.) "were written for our learning;" that is, to acquaint us, firſt, with God's ordinary methods of dealing with men and nations, whether in the way of judgment, or in the way of mercy; and then, to ſhew us the ſureſt means of avoiding the one, and ſecuring the other.

For this end, reaſon teaches, and God commands, that, in the firſt place, the beſt human means be made uſe of for ſafety and deliverance in the day of danger, and that we be earneſt in prayer for a bleſſing upon thoſe means, and for the ſucceſs of them. To uſe means without prayer for the divine bleſſing, is an impious reliance upon our own wiſdom and ſtrength; and to pray without the uſe of human means, is a groundleſs and preſumptuous expectation of aſſiſtance from God.

In this our day of danger, the beſt precautions have been uſed againſt the attempts of the enemy; and thoſe precautions have been accompanied with

* 1745.

the fervent prayers of pious and good chriſtians, for a bleſſing upon them. But, as this is a national danger, there muſt be one ſtep further, to give us a title to the aid and protection of God; I mean a national humiliation for ſins, and a reformation of lives and manners; of the efficacy of which for deliverance from danger, and of the want of them as the forerunner of ruin and deſtruction, we have, as I ſaid, many remarkable inſtances and examples in holy ſcripture. But, ſetting aſide the authority of revelation, nothing can be more abſurd in reaſon, than for a nation to expect aid and protection from God, while it continues in a courſe of open and unreſtrained provocations againſt him; which, tho' the provocations of particular perſons, may juſtly be accounted national in his ſight, if they are open and flagrant, and yet unreſtrained by publick authority.

This, it is true, belongs more immediately to the civil Magiſtrate; but there may be many and great irregularities both in particular perſons and private families, which are not within the compaſs of his knowledge, nor within the reach of his authority, however heinous and provoking they may be in the ſight of God. And therefore it is in vain to hope for a national reformation, unleſs private perſons, who are under no direction but their own, can be perſuaded to lay this matter to heart, and to take diligent heed to their own ways; and unleſs parents and maſters will make a conſcience of doing their part towards it, by exerting the authority which God has given them over their children and ſervants; remembering, that they are not only anſwerable to God for the ſins and irregularities which are committed or connived at within our own walls, but are alſo anſwerable to their country

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for the ſhare they take in bringing down the judgments of God upon it. Nations are made up, firſt of individuals, next of families, and laſtly of bodies and communities; and when there is a hearty concurrence of all theſe in the great work of reformation, then, and not till then, it is truly national; and is the only effectual means of averting the judgments of God, and ſecuring his protection in time of danger, and engaging his aid and aſſiſtance for the ſafety and preſervation of the whole.

I. Toward this great end, let every individual reſolve to do his part, and to anſwer for one; by keeping himſelf clear from the vices of the age, and a religious attendance upon the holy ordinances, publick and private, which God has appointed, as a neceſſary guard to his innocence, againſt the manifold temptations to the violation of it, which are ſo frequently met with. And this I deſire to preſs with the greater earneſtneſs, becauſe, on one hand, no perſon who ſeriouſly attends thoſe holy ordinances, can be either ignorant or unmindful of his duty to God, and man, and himſelf; and, on the other hand, he who lives in the neglect of them, whatever knowledge he may have of his duty, will quickly loſe both the ſenſe and remembrance of it. And, in truth, it is chiefly owing to the habitual neglect of thoſe ordinances by ſome, and a careleſs and formal attendance on them by others, that we ſee among us ſo much lukewarmneſs in religion; which does not ſtop there, but grows apace into an habitual diſregard of it, and an unconcernedneſs about it. And beſides the good and evil of attending or neglecting the ordinances of religion, in their effects, it ought to be further remembered, that a conſtant and ſerious attendance upon them, where there is no reaſon-

able impediment, is enjoined in the goſpel as a matter of ſtrict duty; and that the joining in them with our chriſtian brethren, has been conſidered by the church of Chriſt in all ages, as a neceſſary part of the Chriſtian diſpenſation.

II. The next advance towards a national reformation, muſt be in families; where parents and maſters, in their own perſons, are equally concerned with all other individuals, in what is ſaid under the laſt head. But their concern extends much further; firſt, as they have received power from God to direct and govern all thoſe who are under their care and inſpection; and then, as by the due exerciſe of that power, they, above all others, may contribute to the ſuppreſſion of vice, and increaſe of religion, and by conſequence, to a national reformation; and laſtly, as this power is a talent put into their hands by God, for the neglect or abuſe of which they ſtand accountable to him from whom they received it. Thoſe who are under their care, are alſo under their eye; ſo that they cannot be ignorant of their behaviour, without a ſhameful degree of thoughtleſſneſs, or rather ſtupidity, and an utter unconcernedneſs for religion. And as, without ſuch habitual thoughtleſſneſs and inattention, they cannot be ignorant of the behaviour of their children and ſervants, ſo neither can they be ignorant of their own duty in the government of them, if they will in any meaſure think of it, and attend to it.

The duty of parents with regard to their children, and the duty of maſters with regard to their ſervants, however differing in other reſpects, are, as to our preſent conſideration, much the ſame; that is, to reſtrain them from vice of all kinds, and to watch the firſt beginnings of it, and tendencies

dencies to it; to admoniſh and reprove, and to puniſh if it is found neceſſary; to inſtruct them in their duty, and lead them to the performance of it by a good example, which is the moſt forcible kind of inſtruction; and to oblige them to a due attendance on the worſhip of God, both publick and private, and to a regular obſervation of the Lord's-day. Here is no difficulty in all this, if parents and maſters have a heart to the work, and are regular in their own lives, and will conſider withal, 'How great ſervice they may be daily doing to God and their country; 'How greatly they will be rewarded in the next life for a conſcientious diſcharge of this important duty; and 'How ſeverely puniſhed for the neglect of it. Nor is either the reward or puniſhment to be wonder'd at, when it is conſider'd, that the one is daily laying a foundation of virtue and piety, and the other a foundation of vice and profaneneſs, not only for their own time, but for the next and following generations.

I am willing to hope, that theſe duties, and the conſiderations proper to enforce them, will be ſeriouſly attended to and laid to heart by parents and maſters, for their own ſake, and for the ſake of God and his religion; and at this time, particularly, out of a juſt concern for the preſent and future ſafety and happineſs of theſe kingdoms; being well aſſured, that without a national reformation, we can neither be happy, nor ſafe; and that nothing can ſo effectually contribute to both, as a due regulation in families, under the conduct and direction of their heads and governors; as deſcribed above.

III. From the caſe of families, as having it in their power to contribute greatly to a national reformation,

formation, we will proceed, with the ſame view, to bodies and communities. And here it is, that the buſineſs of the magiſtrate begins. By magiſtrates, I mean all thoſe who are veſted with civil authority; thoſe for whom we pray in our publick Liturgy, "that they may truly and in differently miniſter juſtice, to the puniſhment of wickedneſs and vice, and to the maintenance of God's true religion and virtue."

It is the proper province of miniſters of the goſpel, to labour againſt vice and wickedneſs, by reaſon and argument, by doctrine and example, by publick exhortation and private admonition. But if men will harden themſelves againſt all theſe, and having caſt off a ſenſe of ſhame as well as a ſenſe of duty, will let themſelves looſe into a courſe of impiety and wickedneſs, and an open indulgence in any notorious ſin, they then become fit objects of the miniſter of juſtice; whoſe proper buſineſs it is, as laid out by the Apoſtle, (Rom. xiii. 3, 4.) to be "a terror to evil works," and "not to bear the "ſword in vain;" conſidering himſelf as the "miniſter of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon "him that doth evil." And, in order to this, he is obliged, within his proper ſphere, to watch againſt the growth of open wickedneſs of every kind, and by all proper means to diſcourage it, and, if need be, to reſtrain and puniſh it by a vigorous execution of thoſe wholeſome laws which the legiſlature has provided againſt it. And all this from a ſenſe of the duty which he owes to the publick, and in obedience to God, whoſe providence has entruſted him with power, and to whoſe juſtice he muſt be accountable for the uſe and exerciſe of it; eſpecially in caſes which concern God's honour,

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and the maintaining his religion in the world, againſt vice and profaneneſs. And the greater the regularity is, which magiſtrates, as well as miniſters, do themſelves preſerve and maintain in private life, the greater weight their admonitions and authority muſt have, and the greater their ſtrength will be, for the ſuppreſſing of vice, and promoting the ſame regularity, in their reſpective ſtations.

IV. For theſe great ends the legiſlature have done their part, from time to time, by enacting laws againſt drunkenneſs, ſwearing, and curſing, open lewdneſſes and debaucheries, blaſphemy and profaneneſs, and the profanation of the Lord's-day. But what ſhall we ſay to the execution? when, to our ſhame be it ſpoken, the violation of the laws, and the neglect of puniſhing it, are, in many places, equally notorious. And this notoriety in both, namely, open wickedneſs, unreſtrain'd and unpuniſh'd, is that which may be properly call'd a national guilt. As long as the corruptions of nature are working within, and are favour'd with a variety of temptations without, there will be much ſin and wickedneſs in the world, which the beſt means and endeavours of parents and maſters, miniſters and magiſtrates, cannot prevent; and ſo far particular perſons muſt be anſwerable to God for their own ſins. But if a nation does not uſe the proper means and endeavours to reſtrain it, but on the contrary ſeems unconcerned about it, and ſuffers the laws for oppoſing and ſuppreſſing it to be laid aſleep; by ſuch a general ſupineneſs and neglect, the guilt becomes national, and expoſes the whole to the wrath and judgments of God.

And if ſuch ſhould be found to be the caſe of our own nation, as I doubt it has been too much ſo for years paſt, it behoves us to enquire betimes, what

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are the moſt effectual means of removing the guilt, and averting the judgments of God; eſpecially in a time of publick danger, and when we ſee the judgments coming towards us, and hanging over our heads.

V. In this enquiry, we can have no ſurer guide than the various inſtances of God's dealing with kingdoms and nations, in the way of judgment, and in the way of mercy; as we find them ſet down in the holy ſcriptures. The Old Teſtament abounds with the threatnings of God againſt a ſinful and diſobedient people; with declarations of what they were to expect, if they did not repent and reform. Of this ſort, among many others, are his meſſages to the nation of the Jews by the prophet Jeremiah, juſt before his ſending them into captivity.

"Be thou inſtructed, O Jeruſalem, leſt my ſoul "depart from thee; leſt I make thee deſolate, a "land not inhabited." Jerem. vi. 6.

"Becauſe ye have done all theſe works, and I "ſpake unto you, but you heard not; and I call'd "you but ye anſwer'd not: Therefore I will caſt "you out of my ſight." Jerem. vii. 13, 15.

And in the New Teſtament, where St. Paul enumerates the judgments of God upon the people of Iſrael, for their provocations in the Wilderneſs; he preſſes thoſe examples upon the Corinthians, as the moſt forcible argument to deter them from venturing upon the like provocations. 1 Cor. x. 6. "Now, theſe things were our examples, to the "intent we ſhould not luſt after evil things, as "they alſo luſted;" and ver. 11. "Now, all theſe "things happened unto them for enſamples, and "they are written for our admonition."

But beſides the threatnings and inflictions of temporal judgments in the Old Teſtament, we find

find a threatening in the New, which, though of another kind, muſt appear to every ſincere Chriſtian to be moſt terrible. It is our Saviour's meſſage to the church of Epheſus, by his ſervant St. John, (Rev. ii. 5.) "Remember therefore from whence "thou art fallen, and repent, and do the firſt "works; or elſe I will come unto thee quickly, "and will remove thy candleſtick out of his place, "except thou repent;" that is, I will take from thee the pure light of the Goſpel, which thou haſt hitherto enjoyed. And does it not nearly concern the people of this land, ſeriouſly to conſider and lay to heart the unhappineſs and miſery of having the light of the ſcriptures taken from them, as to all the purpoſes of inſtruction and edification, (while they are in a language which they are neither able, nor allowed to read;) and themſelves left to be guided by the traditions of men, inſtead of the commandments of God; and further required, upon pain of damnation, to embrace traditional doctrines which have not only no authority from ſcripture, our only true rule, but have a direct tendency to poiſon and eat out the very vitals of chriſtianity. And after it has been ſeriouſly conſider'd how terrible ſuch a judgment would be, let it be always remember'd, what our Saviour tells the church of Epheſus, as the only means of preventing and eſcaping it, viz. "except ye repent."

And for our encouragement to take that courſe, as the ſure means of being deliver'd from judgments, whether temporal or ſpiritual, let us alſo remember the gracious declaration which God made to his people by the ſame prophet that denounced his judgments.

"At what inſtant, ſays God, I ſhall ſpeak con-"cerning a kingdom, to pluck up, and to pull "down, and to deſtroy it," "If

"If that nation, againſt whom I have pronoun-
"ced, turn from their evil, I will repent of the
"evil that I thought to do unto them." Jerem. xviii. 7, 8.

Which readineſs in God to ſpare and deliver upon repentance and reformation, is moſt remarkably exemplify'd in his dealing with the Ninevites. The prophet Jonah was ſent to them with this meſſage, "Yet forty days and Nineveh ſhall be overthrown:" and then it follows:

"So the people of Nineveh believed God, and
"proclaim'd a faſt, and put on ſackcloth, from
"the greateſt of them even to the leaſt of them.

"And God ſaw their works, that they turned
"from their evil way; and God repented of the
"evil that he had ſaid that he would do unto them,
"and he did it not." Jonah iii. 4, 5, 10.

Thus hath God, in the language of Moſes to the children of Iſrael, ſet before us Life and Death, Bleſſing and Curſing, (Deut. xi. 26. xxx. 19.) And may the ſame God grant, that in the language of our bleſſed Saviour, we may (Luke xix. 42.)
"know at leaſt in this our day, the things which
"belong unto our peace, before they be hid from
"our eyes." This is the hearty deſire and earneſt prayer of

Your faithful Friend and Paſtor,

Edm.' Lond.'

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